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REMARKS

Claims 1-9 are canceled. Claims 10-14 have been added. The new claims are adequately supported by the specification and drawings as filed. Reconsideration and reexamination are requested.

The Examiner rejected claim 4 under 35 USC 103(a) as being obvious on consideration of Fohl in view of Taguchi et al. The Examiner also rejected claims 5 and 7 under 35 USC 103(a) as being obvious on consideration of the admitted prior art in view of Takada or Japanese document No. 2000-211474(JP'474). Claims 1-9 have been canceled. The rejections are moot.

Claims 10-14 are new. The newly included features in independent claims 10 and 13 are mainly based on the disclosures in the specification at the paragraph bridging pages 8-9 and the paragraph bridging pages 9-10.

As described there, the distinctive features belonging to the invention over the cited prior art include when a collision of the vehicle is predetected, the electric motor is driven for rotation in the normal direction, even when the ratchet claw is engaged with one of the ratchet teeth. The ratchet retractor can rotate in the normal direction in that state. Moreover, when a signal indicating the possibility of a collision of the vehicle has disappeared, the electric motor is driven for rotation in the normal direction in an amount corresponding to one crest of the ratchet teeth.

New independent claim 10 specifically defines a ratchet retractor, a weight, an electric motor and a device separate from the weight and adapted to predict a collision of the vehicle. Said device is recited as sensing means in claim 4 (details of the device are now recited in claim 12 dependent on claim 10). More specifically, claim 10 defines that there is provided a device which is separate from said weight and adapted to predict the collision of the vehicle and send a signal to the electric motor indicating a possibility of the collision of the vehicle so that with said signal from the device, the electric motor is driven for rotation in the normal direction to take up the webbing of the seat belt.

New independent claim 10 further defines at its last paragraph that when said signal from the device indicating the possibility of the collision of the vehicle has disappeared, the electric motor is operated to drive and rotate the reel in the normal

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direction to rotate the reel in an amount corresponding to at least one crest of the ratchet teeth to cancel the locking, thereby loosening the webbing. Here, the unique driving of the electric motor in the normal direction is carried out by the signal from the said device and not by operation or movement of the weight. Further, even if the ratchet claw is engaged with one of the ratchet teeth at this moment, the one crest rotation of the reel permits such engagement to be released easily. Fohl fails to teach or suggest this arrangement even in view of the teachings of Taguchi et al.

Though the Taguchi et al (USP4,478,433) reference is cited in combination with Fohl to negate the patentability of original claim 4, this subsidiary reference shows nothing in connection with a device separate from a weight as recited in new claim 10.

New independent claim 13 is similar to new claim 10 by reciting the above-mentioned features but includes a further definition in connection with the device separate from the weight such that with the signal from the device indicating the possibility of collision of the vehicle, the electric motor is driven for rotation in the normal direction to take up the webbing of the seat belt even in an engaged state of said ratchet claw with one of said ratchet teeth. Please see the paragraph bridging pages 8-9 of the filed text and the first paragraph on page 2 of this letter.

Fohl fails to teach or suggest an arrangement wherein an electric motor is driven for rotation in the normal direction, even when the ratchet claw is engaged with one of the ratchet teeth. In Fohl, the engaged state between the pawl 10 and ratchet teeth 9 is shown in Fig. 6. The Examiner deems return spring 5 as corresponding to the claimed electric motor. However, in the engaged state between one tooth 9 and pawl 10 as shown in Fig. 6, the return spring 5 cannot act to rotate in the normal direction (pulling up direction). If such pulling action by spring 5 is possible in the state of Fig. 6, it then means that the spring force of spring 5 and the pulling force from the belt 31 side are not balanced with each other. This does not result in the state of Fig. 6. Fohl cannot render the matter of new claim 13 known or obvious.

Concerning the other rejection directed to claims 5 and 7 based on the combination of the applicants' admitted prior art with Takada (USP4,314,680) or Japanese publication No. 200-211474, newly proposed independent claims 10 and 13 are also patentable over such combination. That is, such combination does not render

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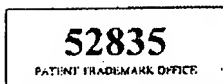
obvious the feature of the last paragraph of each claim. Moreover, the feature of claim 13 mentioned in the preceding paragraph has not been known or obvious from such combination of the prior art.

New claim 11 dependent on claim 10 further recites that when the collision of the vehicle is predetected by said device, the electric motor is operated to rotate the reel in the normal direction even in a state where said ratchet claw has already been engaged with one of the ratchet teeth. This definition substantially corresponds to the definition included in independent claim 13 and is based on the teaching at the paragraph of the filed text bridging pages 8-9. As long as the weight is in a state urging the ratchet claw into engagement with one of the ratchet teeth, the reel is rotated in the normal direction by the electric motor while making the ratchet claw ride over the ratchet teeth to some extent to permit a latter one of the teeth to newly come into engagement with the ratchet claw. Thus, even after some rotation of the reel in the normal direction, the engagement between the ratchet claw and one of the ratchet teeth can be kept as long as the weight is in a position sensing an acceleration equal to or larger than a predetermined value.

It should be noted with respect to claim 14 that in a seat belt device using an electric motor and a conventional weight for sensing an acceleration above a predetermined value, the information outside the seat belt devices such as from ACC, VSA, EPS, SRS or AT is used to cancel locking of the retractor, thereby loosening the webbing. This arrangement eliminates the necessity of using a special sensor or actuator on the seat belt device for making such cancelling of the locking of the retractor.

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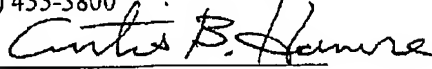
In view of the above, it is submitted that the application is in condition for allowance. Reconsideration and reexamination are requested. Allowance of claims 10-14 at an early date is solicited. Any questions regarding this communication can be directed to the undersigned attorney, Curtis B. Hamre, Reg. No. 29,165 at (612) 455-3802.



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Respectfully submitted,

HAMRE, SCHUMANN, MUELLER &
LARSON, P.C.
P.O. Box 2902
Minneapolis, MN 55402-0902
(612) 455-3800

By: 
Curtis B. Hamre
Reg. No. 29,165
CBIH/tk